STORIES OF ALL SORTS FOR ALL PEOPLE.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 343. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 27, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 343.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 27, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE NIHILISTS

I WAS once a commercial traveller for a large London firm, trading between London and Russia—consequently I passed a considerable time in the latter country, chiefly in St. Petersburg. I have still many friends there, and speak the language as well as my own.

I became attached by degrees to the place, though, I must confess, at first I disliked it. Perhaps it was because it wasn't home, or perhaps because I had no real friend there. To tell the truth, I shrank from making one, as I knew before I had been many weeks in the country that every other man was a spy, and you might sit down and crack a bottle of wine with one whom you thought the jolliest fellow you had met, and next day be marched to prison, with your bosom friend of yesterday brought up as evidence against you.

I had been warned of this, and never encouraged intimacy with anyone. I was beginning to get sick of it all, and seriously thought of going home to England to seek other employers, when an event happened which changed all the current of my life.

It was the beginning of May, and getting very warm in St. Petersburg; so, after my day's work was over, I went down to the bathing-place, where in the hot weather I was accustomed to spend many hours. To-day I was not the only one there, as often happened; there was a young light-haired Russian enjoying himself in the water. It wasn't very long before I was following his example, and in about twenty minutes I was out again, drying myself and watching the gambols of this young fellow.

"He must be tolerably fond of bathing," I said to myself, "to stay in that ice bath so long;" for he was in it when I arrived, and how long he had been there before, of course I could not say.

I turned away to dress, and had put on my trousers and shirt, when I looked round to see if he was out yet or performing any strange antics; but he was no longer to be seen. I looked for his clothes, which were still there, but no signs of the bather. Good heavens! what was that? A hand surely! yes! And now another, and a head! and a murmured scream for help! To jump in just as I stood, half dressed, and haul him on land was the work of an instant.

He was practically unconscious, and till I felt his heart gently beating, I thought him dead; after, with much labour, rubbing, chafing, and administering brandy, which I providentially had with me, I got him into a carriage, and, learning his address from a card in his pocket, had him driven to his home.

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I never shall forget the scene when, the cabman and myself helping the poor half-drowned fellow from the cab, the hall door opened, and his widowed mother and only sister came shrieking down the garden to the gate, fancying we were bringing his corpse.

In a few hours he was conscious and on the way to recovery. In the meantime the good people had insisted on my going to bed, and had ordered their man-servant to rub me well with brandy and swathe me in hot blankets.

Some time in the evening I awoke and found a complete set of clothing laid out for me; so, feeling as right as a trivet, I jumped up and dressed. Being dressed, I went out to inquire how the patient was getting on; and, as I opened my door, the one opposite opened also, and the mother came forward with both hands outstretched.

"Now you are yourself again, let me give you a mother's blessing for having saved her only son."

She then kissed me once on the forehead and twice on the chin, in Russian style, and added, "And now come to see Peter; he is doing charmingly, and cannot rest until he thanks his preserver."

We entered the room, and there, lying in bed, was the light-haired youth, looking more like what I first saw in the water than the corpse-like body I had dragged out with its flaxen hair clinging tightly to the face. Beside him sat the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I couldn't stop the blessings and thanks they all showered on my head—so let them have their say and make a fool of me to the top of their bent.

The end of it was that I was persuaded to give up my lodgings and live with them; the very natural consequence being that I fell in love with Catrina, the lovely daughter, and (what was not so natural a consequence) she with me. I never spent such happy days as I did in that quiet, peaceful new home of mine. The widow loved me as a son; Peter was a brother who could never find anything sufficient to show his friendship for me; and Catrina—ah! that was the sweetest of all! Catrina not only loved, but ere long accepted me as her affianced husband.

Alas! it was destined by Providence that my happiness was not to last, and as I pondered over it afterwards, I thought it was too perfect and too sweet to be permanent.

The blow fell upon me about three weeks after the accident happened—in fact, I received two blows together.

One was a letter from my sister to say my mother was dangerously ill, and that, if I wanted to see her alive, I must return at once to England. The other was from my employers, saying that, as the firm had experienced severe losses in the Colonies, my services would no longer be required. Phew! What was to be done? I showed Catrina both letters, and asked her advice.

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"Go home directly," she said.

"Will you come with me, Catrina?"

"No," she replied; "I cannot leave my mother."

I had two most miserable days talking and arranging about my departure. Peter had obtained a berth for me, and it was agreed that on my return I should marry Catrina, and settle down in Russia for life.

The next day I was *en route* for England.

I found my mother very ill with rheumatic fever, but not in danger. Of course it was not very long before both she and my sister knew of my attachment to Catrina, and, although they didn't like the idea of my marrying a foreigner, yet, when I interpreted her sweet letters to them, they had to admit that she seemed most ardently attached to me.

My mother got rapidly better, and in August was recommended to go to Homburg, and take the mineral baths and drink the waters, and she insisted on my accompanying her. We arrived after a hot and dusty two days' journey. I secured excellent rooms in a charming little villa on the *Unter Promenade*.

I enjoyed myself very much at Homburg. I met a great number of Russians whom I had known in their own country, and it was a great treat to me to speak the language again; it reminded me so much of Catrina and my Russian home.

There was one gentleman I took a great fancy to—a man called Scholvolski, a commercial traveller like myself. He seemed to have taken an equal fancy to me, and was always asking me to dine with him at the restaurant. Sometimes a friend of his dined with us, a man I disliked—why I knew not, unless it was that his expression was diabolical, sensual, cruel, and pitiless. I told my friend Scholvolski one day that I wouldn't join him again if he asked his friend. To which he replied, laughingly, "Oh, he's not a bad fellow, only his face is so much against him."

If I had been in Russia I should not have acted as incautiously as I did. In the first place, I should not have encouraged the intimacy of Scholvolski, and in the second I should not have opened my lips and spoken so freely of Russia before his friend—I should have set him down at once for a deadly spy.

But here in Europe I could afford to laugh at all such ideas, and put the thought of spies, midnight arrests, the knout, and all such barbarities out of my head, and give my opinion as loud and as long as I chose about Russia and her customs. This I did very frequently—more especially as I was constantly led on to do so by my friend Scholvolski.

I had been about a month at Homburg, my mother was wonderfully improved, and very anxious to get back home, when a most curious circumstance happened to me. I had not received a letter from Catrina for more than three weeks, and was getting uneasy. I was quite willing to return home, being impatient to ascertain if any letters had arrived from Russia, and had been forwarded and lost. I wrote a long, loving letter to Catrina, telling her I had missed her usual weekly despatch, informing her also of my mother's convalescence and of my impatient desire to get back to Russia and make her my wife with as little delay as possible.

I showed Catrina both letters.

We settled to leave Homburg the following day, and I went to post my letter and bid adieu to my friends. Coming out of the post-office, on the bottom step I saw something glittering in the sun. I picked it up—it was the prettiest little ornament I ever saw. A scarf pin, evidently made to fasten like a brooch, about the size of a shilling; and round it some cabalistic figures inclosed within a garter; two letters interwoven in the centre on red and blue enamel—the letters being in brilliants; a blue enamel 7 at the top, and the letter K hanging from the bottom in plain gold.

I thought the best way to find its owner was to wear it myself; so I stuck it in the left lappel of my coat, and on my black coat it glistened famously. I looked next morning among the list of things lost, in the glass case in the vestibule of the Kursaal; but no notice was up yet. "Well," I thought, "I'll give it till to-morrow, and then I'll hand it to the Commissaire of Police."

In looking for Scholvolski I met his obnoxious friend, who glared in a frightful way at the jewel in my coat, which made me say, in fun, "How do you like the order I have received?"

"Did you receive that?" he asked, apparently unable to keep his eyes off it.

"Why shouldn't I?" I answered, laughing.

He turned on his heel and left me suddenly.

At last, seated at the roulette-table, I found Scholvolski. I touched him on the shoulder, and asked, "What luck?"

"Ah, my dear friend!" he answered, "the same—always bad. How are you? But what—what—" and he too stared with all his might at my order, and seemed to turn pale.

"Well," I thought, "this must be something remarkably interesting. Do they take me for a king in disguise; or do they think I've stolen the decoration? At any rate, I won't tell them until I find out what they mean."

"Come away quickly," said Scholvolski, taking my arm and leading me on to the terrace, where we sat down at a table and had some coffee. All this time he never took his eyes off my decoration.

At last I said, "Well, my friend, how do you like my new order, eh? I flatter myself this is rather better than your dirty little bit of green and orange ribbon."

"Have you had it long?" he asked, seriously.

"No," I replied, "not very long. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; only I thought——. Oh, come and dine with me——quite alone, I assure you; this is our last night."

In vain I pleaded packing.

"Bah!" said he; "you have a good hour before dinner."

It was of no use; he would take no excuse; and when I said, "All right," a curious look came over his face. I didn't understand it then—I did some hours after.

We had a most sumptuous dinner—by far the best he had ever given me. He drank very deeply, and I am ashamed to say I did the same—a thing I am not given to at all; but whether it was the hot night, the hot room, or the excellence of the wine (it was best Johannisberg, two Napoleons the bottle), I know not; all I remember is, we rose late, having had great arguments about Russian politics, secret societies, and other things connected with his country; and I felt anything but firm on my legs.

"I'll see you home, old fellow," he said, taking my arm and leading me out. "*Allons* for home, sweet home! You've got your order all right, haven't you?" he shouted in my ear; and glaring down on it, his face, to my distempered vision, appeared to have turned yellow.

"Oh, yes, I've got it safe enough," I laughingly answered. "I'm not going to lose such a treasure as that."

"No, mind you don't," he shouted again, and looked yellower than ever.

By this time we had passed through the vestibule, and he hailed a carriage off the stand.

"Get in," he said, quite roughly.

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"No, thanks," I replied. "I prefer the fresh air, and will walk home; so good-night and good-bye."

"Oh, do just drive with me as far as my lodgings; and we'll walk back to your house together," he pleaded, in his old, kind, gentle way; and, as it was our last night together, I thought I'd humour him, so I got into the cab. He gave some directions in a low tone to the cabman, and off we drove in the opposite direction to my home.

Two or three times I asked my companion where on earth we were going to; but he sat silent, puffing a cigar, and looking very serious; and seeing we were in the country, I could stand it no longer, so I leant out of the cab and asked the coachman where he was driving. I did not catch his reply, for at this moment we pulled up at a solitary, and apparently uninhabited house.

"Here we are. Jump out," said Scholvolski.

The cab drove off rapidly towards Homburg.

"What house is this?" I inquired.

"My lodging," he replied, at the same time giving a peculiar whistle I had heard that afternoon in the gardens.

As he finished speaking, a small panel in the upper portion of the door opened; whereupon Scholvolski said two or three words which I did not catch, and the noise of unlocking and unbarring the door immediatey followed.

"Enter," said my friend.

I had half a mind to turn sharp round, and make a bolt for Homburg. How I wished I had done so before many minutes had elapsed! Scholvolski, following close behind me, gave me a push away from the door, near to which I was lingering, and at the same time it shut with a tremendous bang. The doorkeeper, who I now saw by his lamp was a gigantic ugly Russian, barred it carefully, and then turning round, thrust his lamp full in my face, and pointing to my order, said, with a hoarse laugh:

"Welcome!"

"Come on!" shouted Scholvolski from the end of the dark passage. "Bring the light and show us in."

"All right," answered James; and he followed till we came to where Scholvolski was waiting. Then, throwing open a door, he said something in a low voice, at the same time my friend gave me another awful push that sent me flying into the room; so that, to save myself from falling, I clutched at the back of a chair, and so steadied myself and recovered my senses.

I was in a large, long room, brilliantly lighted, with a table running nearly the whole length, round which were seated about thirty men, all smoking cigarettes. A man who was sitting at the head of the table got up, and said, "Gentlemen, welcome."

To my horror, this man, who seemed the president of the party, was Scholvolski's friend, the one whom I so much disliked.

Just then Scholvolski touched me on the arm, and asked: "How do you like their orders?"

I glanced in the direction he indicated, and saw that every man had on his breast a facsimile of the jewel I wore.

During this time I had been standing in the centre of the room, with Scholvolski near me.

He now said: "Won't you take a seat, and join in the conversation?"

"No, thank you," I replied, feigning coolness. "As it is so late I must be off. But tell me, before I go, who are these gentlemen, and what is the meaning of the order they each wear?"

"You'll soon know," he answered; and, advancing to the table, said, in a loud voice: "Mr. President and gentlemen, this man has asked me to explain who you are, and the meaning of the order (although he himself wears one) on your breasts. What answer shall I give him?"

Whereupon the President rose and said, "Gentlemen, what do you say to trying the traitor now?"

The men round the table silently nodded their heads.

"Good," rejoined the President. "Let the trial begin."

"What does this mean?" I asked of my friend. "Are they rehearsing a scene from a play? At all events, I'm sorry I can't stay to see the fun. So, if you won't come, I must find my way home alone. So good night. Gentlemen I have the honour to wish you a very good evening."

I wrote a long letter to Catrina.

With a polite bow I turned to the door, and tried to open it; but there was no handle, and I pushed in vain.

Scholvolski came up to me. "You can't leave yet; these gentlemen have a few questions to ask you; so come and sit down quietly, and answer them, or——"

"Or what?" I asked, indignantly. "Is this some trap you have led me into? You had better take care. Remember, you are not in Russia."

"Not much difference, though, in this room."

"That we shall see," I said; and, rushing to the door, began hammering at it and shouting at the top of my voice. The whole party smiled at my efforts, which made me more furious; and I redoubled my knocking and calls for help. All at once it opened with a burst that nearly knocked me backwards, and the huge doorkeeper entered. I rushed at the closing door; but he was too quick for me. It was shut again in an instant; and he stood with his back against it.

"Put him in the chair," said the President to this big brute.

"All right, mister," was his reply, and, walking to a cupboard, he brought out a sort of arm-chair with straps and ropes, which he placed in the centre of the room, and then beckoned me to sit in it.

"No!" I exclaimed, "I'm not going to be put tamely in that chair," and I caught up the one I had been leaning against, determined to hold my own. "What is it you want of me? Is it to rob me? Because, if so, I will quietly give you everything I have; but if you think you are going to play any tricks, you are very much mistaken; for the first man who approaches me I'll brain!"

I had hardly concluded when the big porter threw himself heavily upon me, and, with the assistance of two or three more, I was placed in the chair and bound down so securely as to be unable to move hand or foot. My tongue was free, though, and most foolishly, I commenced cries for help. In a couple of seconds I was gagged, and then I was indeed helpless.

"Now," said the President, "Let us get on quickly. Come, Scholvolski, your evidence."

And, to my astonishment, this man, whom I had thought my friend, took out a small pocket-book, and from it read all the conversations we had had together, the opinions I had expressed to him on secret societies in particular, winding up by telling them how I had displayed to him my new order.

As he sat down, seemingly perfectly satisfied with what he had done, I was well aware that I was trapped in the den of a Russian secret society, which bore me some terrible grudge—either for having spoken so openly and scoffingly of it, or for wearing the wretched order I had found.

One after another of the men seated at the table, and to whom I had at times spoken, got up, and repeated all that I had said to them, and generally a good deal more.

When all had had their say, the President rose, and said: "Gentlemen and brothers, this traitor has to be tried by you on the following charges: first, for having (knowing us

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all to belong to this society) taken every opportunity of maligning and ridiculing it; secondly, for having, by some means unknown to us as yet—but which we will presently get from him—worn our secret order publicly and ostentatiously, and probably explained to everybody he knows its mysterious meaning.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen. How say you, guilty, or not guilty?"

Without a word being spoken, every man held up his hand.

"Guilty on both charges," added the President. "And now your sentence."

Again they all raised their hands.

"Death!" said the President. "Gentlemen and brothers, in your verdict and sentence I fully concur."

I had nearly fainted as he uttered these last words, and I think I should have done so, but that the porter undid the gag; and the President, rising, addressed me thus: "Prisoner and traitor, you have heard the charges, evidence, verdict, and sentence; have you anything to say why it should not be carried out?"

I nerved myself, and, as boldly as I could, spoke the following words: "Russians, most of you—particularly one (and I looked hard at Scholvolski, who dropped his eyes)—have professed friendship for me; and yet now you want to kill me. Why is this? What have I done? You say I have talked about your secret societies; well, so does every other man you meet; and in Europe everybody says what he thinks. You assert that I have worn your order, knowing it to be the order of your society. This I emphatically deny; as I only picked it up in the streets a few minutes before I met that man" (pointing to the president, for, oddly enough, I had never heard his name).

As I uttered the words "picked it up" there was a smile of derision—they evidently did not believe me. How was I to prove my words? No one had been near me when I found it.

"Is that all you have to say?" asked the President, "because that goes for nothing."

"Let me warn you," I hotly answered. "You are not in Russia, where you can get rid quietly of any obnoxious person, but in Europe; and you'll find yourselves with ropes round your necks if you dare lay violent hands on me."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the brutal President.

"One minute, Frushinkoff," said Scholvolski.

"Hush! hush! How could you be so imprudent? before that man, too!"

"Pardon me; it slipped out," rejoined Scholvolski; "but I don't think he will ever repeat it."

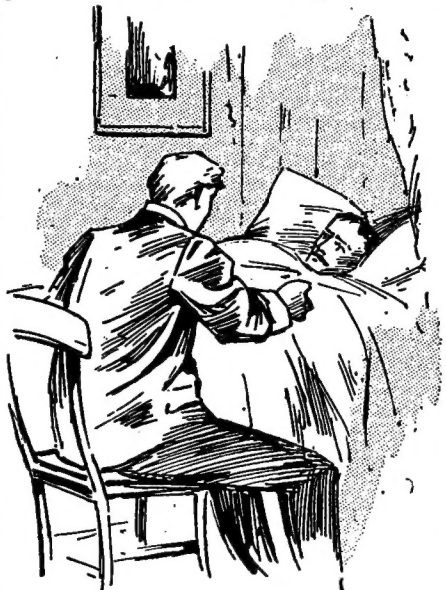
While this bye-talk had been going on between them, I had been racking my brain to try and remember where I had heard the name of Frushinkoff, when all at once I recollected that he was the man who had been at the head of a conspiracy to assassinate the Tsar, and was known to be the most cruel, unscrupulous man in the world. Now I no longer wondered why I had so instinctively mistrusted him, and it was in his merciless hands my life was placed.

"One minute," resumed Scholvolski, having, apparently, appeased the President; "I suppose, as usual, we keep a memento?"

"Certainly," replied the President, and nodded to the porter, who went to the cupboard, and produced a long flat box, which he placed on the table.

"How many will his make?" asked Scholvolski.

"Let's see," said the President, and, with a small gold key attached to his watch-chain, he unlocked the box. How he glared at the contents! "His will be the ninth!" said the President.



He showed me the unlucky ornament.

"Pass it round," asked Scholvolski, who was close to me; and when it was put down in front of him, my curiosity tempted me to look within it too. Heavens! what did I see? A row of human thumbs!

I shut my eyes at the horrid sight, and felt my blood run cold on hearing Scholvolski say, with a laugh, "Karl, you will have to enlarge this space; our friend's thumb here" (and he touched my thumb, which lay outstretched, my arm being bound to the arm of the chair), "is very large."

"The night is half over," said the President, "and we've lots to do before dawn; so come, Karl, the hatchet; and, Scholvolski, you write the card to attach to it, as a memoir of to-night's good work."

Good gracious! my thumb too large for the space! the hatchet! What does it all mean? I knew I had to die, but not to be tortured to death; not to have my limbs hacked off before my eyes. The thought was too fearful.

Although I was nearly unconscious, half dead with fright, I have a misty recollection of seeing the huge porter come up to me with a short hatchet in his hand, and unbind my forearm, laying it in a sort of iron groove which he fitted on the arm of the chair; then, binding it down again on this, and separating my thumb from the other fingers, by covering them with a sheet of lead, which fitted down tightly to the chair. Then he raised the hatchet.

. . . . . .

"Where am I? Who are these people standing round my bed?"

"Well, old fellow, how do you feel, eh?"

"Peter! no, it can't be!"

"He's just awake, mamma."

"Surely that's my sister Julia's voice!"

"Oh, I'm so glad, the dear boy!"

"And that's my mother's!"

In moving, such a pain shot through my right arm that I shrieked. Ah! now I remember. It was no dream, then, after all, but a stern reality. My thumb! Yes, it was missing; and my hand and arm were bound up. But why didn't they kill me? I must get them to tell me. But how came Peter here? Oh, how feeble my voice was.

"Hush!" they all said; "*to-morrow.*"

To-morrow came, and still they said to-morrow; and so, many morrows came and went. At last, after about seven to-morrows, they all assembled round my bed, and kissed me, and asked me how I felt.

"May I talk now?" I asked, eagerly.

"Yes," they answered, "for you are saved."

"Saved!" I exclaimed; "has it been so bad as that?"

They silently nodded their heads, looking very serious.

"For pity's sake, don't do that!" I exclaimed, for it reminded me of that night, and of those silent men.

"Now, Peter, sit down by his bedside, and tell him quietly how you saved his life," said my mother.

"You saved my life, Peter?"

"Yes, my dear friend; even as you once saved mine. I have never forgotten it, and at last I found an opportunity of returning the compliment. You know, of course, that nearly every Russian belongs to some secret society—I among others. We have our signs, signals, and private orders, which, of course, we only wear *entre nous*. Now for my share in this wretched business.

"Some weeks ago my firm ordered me to England. My sister was always pining to be there, and my mother was wretched at the thought of separation from me, who had never been away from her before. So we agreed to go to your country, and take you by surprise; and that is the reason you have not heard from us for some time."

"Is Catrina here, then?" I demanded, excitedly.

"Hush! yes; the doctor wouldn't let you see her before.

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This afternoon, if you are quiet, you may. But, to resume, I went to your house in the country, and found you were in Homburg; and as I had still a week or two before I began work, I thought I would bring my mother and Catrina over here with me. Ah, dear me! how unlucky it was I came!"

She came!

"Why?"

"If I hadn't come, you would never have picked up that order. If you hadn't picked up that order, you would not have gone through that dreadful night. And if you hadn't picked up that order, you would have a thumb on your right hand now."

"But how did your coming do all this?"

"Because," he answered, slowly, "that order you picked up I dropped."

"You?"

"Yes. See, here it is," and unbuttoning his waistcoat, he showed me the unlucky ornament.

"Put it away, for heaven's sake," I cried, "it makes my arm ache so!"

"Pardon me, my friend, but I want you to know everything. Now to conclude, and tell you how I came to be lucky enough to save you.

"On the afternoon we arrived I went off to the post-office to ask for letters. It was there I must have lost this. After dinner I started to ascertain if you were still at the Kursaal. Thinking I might meet some of my secret friends, I looked to see if the order was safe, and found, to my dismay, it was gone. As I walked up to the Kursaal, I carefully looked all over the ground. I saw it nowhere.

"At the post-office I looked carefully, especially on the steps, when an official asked me what I had dropped. I told him a small jewel; he then said he had seen an English gentleman pick it up, and fasten it in his coat. Then I *was* frightened, for if any of my society were to see it in his coat, it would cost him his life, I knew; so I tore all round the Kursaal, which was shutting up, but could find no trace of anyone with the order, nor of you.

"I wandered about long after the rooms were closed, and, at last, was going home very disconsolately, when I met a man hurrying along in the opposite direction, and in whom I recognised a Russian friend, a member of my society. We chatted for some minutes, when, looking at his watch, he told me he must hurry, or he should miss the fun.

"'What fun?' I asked.

"'Oh, some Englishman, or half Russian, half English, has got hold of some of our private signals, knows all about our society, and this very afternoon has been publicly wearing our order; how he got it no one can say; he has been gulled into attending the meeting, and is to be tried to-night. I'm off to see what Frushinkoff and Scholvolski intend to do with him.'

"Off we both started, called a carriage, and arrived shortly after at the awful house. The doorkeeper wouldn't admit me at first, because I couldn't show my order; but, luckily, my friend was a very important member of the society, and became guarantee for me.

"We entered the room, and were recognised directly, and every one began to tell us what the culprit had done.

"'But the fool has fainted, and we want him to come to, that we may finish him,' said Frushinkoff to me.

"'Let me see him,' I said; 'I know a little about medicine, and perhaps can succeed.'

"They made way for me, and I stood beside the fainting man. Oh, my friend, what an awful shock! for it was you, my dear, good brother. It was you who had picked up the order I dropped, and had suffered such agony for my carelessness.

"I immediately protested against their treatment. I told them it was my order which I had lost; and I referred them to the witness I had met with in the official.

"Well, after immense trouble, and on my going security for you with my life, they eventually allowed me to take you away.

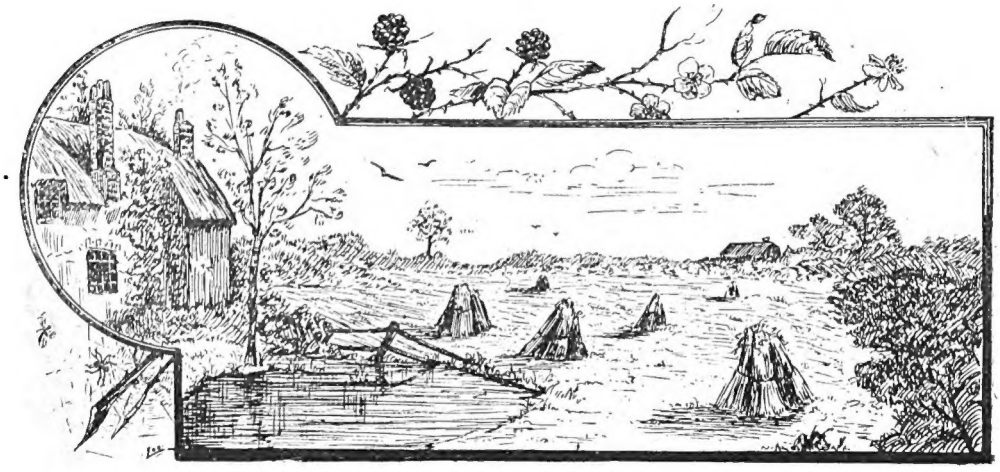
"There, that's all; and now you must get well again as quickly as possible."

"How lucky you came in time," was all I could murmur.

Just then my mother and sister came in, and seeing my wistful glance at the door, Julia smiled and called for Catrina.

She came, and how I doted on her.

My story is done. We all returned to England the moment I was well enough. Peter took a small house for his mother and Catrina, close to ours, and we were very happy. In a month or two I married Catrina, and Peter, Julia.



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A GOOD SAMARITAN

A STORY OF INDIAN WARFARE.

IT was so hot that the blue-gum leaves fairly sizzled. So hot, that, as Pete Oberlin looked across the road from his shanty, the outlines of the Oasis Saloon, and those of the combined post-office and grocery, seemed to waver and dance in the furnace current rising to the glaring, brazen sky. Hot as it was out of doors, it was still more like an oven in Pete's little one-room hut, for the fire was blazing, and Pete, coatless and vestless, was looking after a frying-pan of bacon and a mess of boiling potatoes.

The appetising odour floated out of the doorway and spread over the neighbourhood. It was distinctly noticeable as far off as the row of lopped eucalypti beyond the saloon. At the foot of one of these trees lay what at first sight seemed only a bundle of rags; but a closer inspection revealed a shock of black hair and glimpses of a brown parchment skin that indicated a human being.

Gradually, as the welcome aroma reached the creature's befogged brain, the heap of rags stirred and tossed, and finally, uplifting bodily, resolved itself into a very dirty and torn blanket, surmounted by a hideous, blear-eyed countenance. The old hag—for it was a woman—sniffed at the wandering fragrance, trying to catch its direction, and then staggered unsteadily across the road to Pete's cabin.

"Helloe, there, Wawaga! Gettin' over yer spree?" greeted that gentleman easily.

"Umph! No drunk! Injun hungry!" remarked the visitor.

Pete, laughing good-naturedly, replied: "You wait; I'll give you a bite pretty quick now."

The old woman squatted on her heels by the stove and greedily eyed the preparations for the feast, while Pete kept his own eyes steadily on his cooking to forestall any possible burning. The squaw's restless gaze roved round the room, finally pausing at the shelf behind the stove, upon which stood a cheap alarm-clock and a big black bottle; whereupon she announced, in her quavering croak:

"Ol' Injun heap thirsty."

Pete laughed again. "Go along out ter ther pump, then," he said.

But Wawaga's eye was still glued to the interesting object before her. Soon Pete himself went out to the pump, bucket in hand; immediately the bundle of rags by the wall stretched up a lean arm, with the quick and stealthy motion of a pouncing cat, and, seizing the bottle, poured the fiery contents down through the brown, parchment throat.

Such an unearthly howling and yelling followed this successful thievery, that Pete dropped his bucket and came running in, to find his guest doubled up in agony and rolling on the floor screeching like mad.

"What in thunder's struck her?" he cried; but just then catching sight of the black bottle still clutched in the Indian's skinny claw, his blank look turned to a wide grin. He dropped on the nearest box, slapping his thigh and chuckling: "My eye! ef the old fool ain't drunk that ther quart o' lamp oil!" The terror-stricken screaming redoubled, while the man watched the poor wretch's antics in ecstasy. "It'll teach her to quit meddlin'," he muttered gleefully; but as the moments passed he began to realise that the matter was serious, for the creature's contortions grew awful, and her anguish too great for amusement.

Pete's grin faded insensibly; he scratched his head thoughtfully, grumbling: "Don't know as I want the old gal kickin' the bucket here and now, but what in creation's a feller goin' ter do fer her? Oh, gosh! I know!" He bolted across the road, sending up a choking cloud of powdery soil, and burst into the store.

"I say, Ike, yer got any mustard?" he demanded. "Old Wawaga's drunk all my lamp oil, an' it's goin' to kill her! Don't yer hear that screechin'?"

Ike Dempsey, roused from his mid-day nap, rubbed his eyes and stretched himself, then rising deliberately from the barrel on which he was sitting and thrusting his quid into one cheek, drawled lazily: "Wal, now, where's the hurt ef the ol' sot do gin us the shake? Oh, doan't be in er rush naow! I guess ther's a can er mustard raound somewhere."

Reaching a long, lazy arm under the counter, he clattered among his possessions and brought up a fistful of yellow-brown dust. "This here nuff? Never mind payin'!" In two minutes more Pete Oberlin laid violent hands on the rolling heap of agony in his cabin, and sternly commanded, "Drink this." She drank it. Then the frontierman dragged her bodily outside the shanty, and left her alone with her misery.

After some time Pete returned to his patient, bearing a tin plate with a generous share of his dinner. He presented this with a flourish, and grinned sympathetically as the morsels of food disappeared.

When the shadows of the blue-gums stretched long and gaunt to the eastward, and a mellow pink flushed the tops of the grand, distant mountains, a tipsy and squalid old squaw, in tattered blanket, trailed slowly up the dusty road through the foothills; and for six months neither Ike Dempsey, nor Pete, nor even Pat Grogan at the saloon, saw any more of Wawaga.

When Pete Oberlin reached up to the shelf behind the stove that night, and, after feeling vainly in the darkness, struck a match and examined the surface, he let forth a volley of imprecations, finishing up with: "Wisht I'd let the old thief die and be hanged to her, afore ever she got away with my hand-carved briar-wood pipe."

. . . . . .

Week after week Pete Oberlin, in his capacity of mail-carrier, jogged over the dusty plain, wound in and out through the foothills, with a stop here and there at the ranches, and climbed over the ridge to the fort on the reservation, always the destination of the biggest part of his budget.

After the early rains had carpeted the bare brown hills with green and given a glossier tinge to the mournful bark-stripped eucalyptus, he began to hear ugly rumours on his trips from farmhouse to farmhouse. There had not been an Indian outbreak for twenty years in that section, but some disquieting influence was hard at work on the red-skins. Some said the Indian Messiah was coming, others that one of Geronimo's lieutenants had been sowing this excitement among them; be that as it may, there was watchful anxiety at the fort, and a growing feeling of danger in the breasts of the neighbouring ranchmen.

Every bit of this came, of course, to the ears of the mail-carrier, and, in the snug bar-room of the "Oasis," he would regale a little knot of cronies with highly coloured tales of the secret dances, the weapons, and war preparations to be seen in wild nooks in the hills, if a white man knew where to look for them. Yet for all these notes of warning no one dreamt of an actual dangerous uprising.

One soft winter's night, when the damp-laden rain wind blew heavily from the south, and the low-hung cloud blanket shut out every wee ray of starlight, dark-mounted figures met

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in a sheltered hill basin. Ten, twenty, fifty, they gathered; then in single file, with muffled hoofs, they wound away from their prison. Several hours later, as the mischievous band stealthily made its way out on the plain, a stunted figure, in a ragged blanket, shrunk silently into the bushes to let the cavalcade pass, and then emerged once more from her cover and struck into a swinging trot in the rear of the swift-moving riders.

A faint, angry flush of dawn peeped over the sombre mountains as the redskins surrounded the few scattered buildings composing Rush Station. A dog barked in the rear of the saloon, and in response, a sharp report sent a shudder through the chill morning air; with a howl of anguish, the poor beast rolled over in the dust. At the crack of the pistol, the half-dozen men in the shanties came tumbling out from different doorways. Not one was more than half-dressed, but each one had snatched up his rifle. What odds are six men against fifty?

As the hastily wakened settlers stumbled out from their cabins, a leaden hail rattled round them; two of their number fell, struck off at once by the raiders. "Injuns!" cried Ike Dempsey, and the four remaining defenders, now very thoroughly aroused, drew quickly back into the store and blazed away from this cover at their murderous assailants. They had ammunition in plenty and spare guns. Ike's wife put her two little sobbing children into a big box in the centre of the building, as the point that was furthest from danger, and herself filled the hot, smoking rifles.

The fusilade was thick and fast, and bullets flew in through the openings. Pat Grogan's right arm was shattered, but he rested his gun on the window and fired away vindictively. Poor Smith was shot through the lungs, and fell in a dying condition; Mrs. Dempsey took his place, handling her rifle deftly. Time and again some sharp howl of anguish told of a well-directed shot at the half-concealed, sinister foemen.

Morning was advancing; perhaps by this time the flight from the reservation was discovered, and soldiers were coming to help them—if only they could keep the red devils at bay a little longer. Vain hope! Black Wing, chief of the raiders, had also thought of the soldiers; he concluded it was time to make short work of these sharp-sighted marksmen who were picking off his companions. There came a sudden, fearful yelling, a swift rush and retreat of moccasined feet, then the pungent smell of smoke, and the ominous crackling of the fire licking up the dry boards. The heat became intolerable—to remain was sure death from the destroying element.

"We must run for it, boys!" cried Pete Oberlin. "The door of my shanty stands open, an' there ain't no Injuns inside it!"

The shot-riddled portal was flung wide, with the two little lads in the middle, the forlorn hope sought a new refuge, their guns speaking death in the passage. Ike Dempsey fell in his own doorway, shot through the brain. Pat Grogan fell in the roadway, and, at the same moment, the brave who had shot him reeled and toppled down from his saddle. With a horrible sense of sickness, Pete saw a savage horseman bury his tomahawk in the woman's head, and then snatch up one of the children and dash his skull on the door-stone. The other little fellow slipped from the hand that grasped at him, and stumbled over the cabin threshold, barely escaping a bullet; a sharp whistle cut the air, Pete felt a stinging pain in his shoulder, and fell to the ground unconscious.

With an exultant shout at the destruction of this last enemy, the savage band swarmed from their place of attack, and hastily entered the buildings, stowing away whatever was easily portable, and making sad havoc in Grogan's stock of liquors; but they were not yet far enough from the reservation to allow themselves a long stop. The store was burning fiercely. To force his unruly followers to hurry, Black Wing fired the saloon with his own hand, the wooden frame blazing like tinder.

One by one the sheds were ignited; three or four wretches, with fresh, gory scalps dangling at their belts, rushed over to apply the torch to the only remaining building—Pete Oberlin's shanty. A young brave stumbled over the inanimate form in the pathway, and with a hoop of delight waved his keen blade over the thick black locks. Just as he stooped to his victim, an odd, long-drawn cry arrested his arm in its motion. A wild and dust-covered figure sprang into the blood-crazed circle, pouring out a torrent of guttural abuse and lamentations that somehow commanded attention.

The old woman—for it was Wawaga—bent over the prostrate man, waving off the armed braves, and felt for the faintest of heart-beats; then raising herself to her full height, shaking back her snaky hair, and with a rude, powerful majesty, she commanded in her own tongue:

"Go, while yet you have time! Before the morning has ended, the soldiers will be on you. This man still lives. He is mine; do not touch him; you have the scalps of the others."

Wawaga was one of the mothers of the tribe, and her words had weight with the warriors. Black Wing mounted his pony, and all his raiders did likewise. In the light of the grey, cloudy morning, a wild procession scurried over the plain and away once more to the mountains, where they could find secret hiding and for months elude their pursuers, while they kept the whole country in terror with their burning and killing.

When Pete Oberlin, lying in his own bunk, opened his eyes on the dim scene lighted by the flickering fire, he thought he had gone through a horrible dream. Kicking off the covers, he sat up with a vigorous jerk; but the sharp pain in his shoulder made him grind his teeth in agony. At the same moment he became aware of a dark figure crouched in one corner holding a bundle of white. His sudden motion and muttered exclamation stirred the quiet watcher; stumbling to her feet, she bore her burden to the pallet and deposited it beside him. "Him live, lil boy," she announced gravely.

Pete sank back beside the sleeping child, with a choking sensation, half-thankfulness for their escape and half-horror at the suddenly conjured picture of the boy's murdered mother and brother. He remembered how he was wounded. How had they two escaped scalping? How came Wawaga there? Were the redskins still at the station? If so, he must use great caution. Perhaps they had kept him for torture. The woman anticipated his queries. "Injuns gone! You go now, 'fore come back!" Pete started again upright, maintaining his position in spite of the shooting and dreadful dizziness.

"Which way shall I go, and how?" he asked eagerly. "I must teke little Jim. Did them raskils git all their hosses?"

"White man keep still! Wawaga get pony!" and the old woman drew the tattered blanket round her and slipped noiselessly from the room, leaving Pete to his own busy thoughts. She was gone but a few seconds before she glided in again, muttering, "Him ready. You go fort, no find Injuns!"

Wawaga herself carried out the boy. "No touch, arm hurt," she said, motioning away the wounded man. Very gently she lifted the tiny figure, stilling the fretful wail and coaxing him to wake up and ride on the pony. She led the way, and Pete followed. As he stepped out into the dusk, his heart swelled at the utter desolation. Only the scorched row of gum-trees marked the site of the Rush Station beside his forlorn little cabin.

With a good deal of wrenching and pain Pete clambered into the saddle; the squaw lifted the boy before him; the man gathered the bridle into his useful hand, encircling the child with the same arm. Before he put spurs to his horse and set out on his perilous journey, he leant down towards the stunted and squalid hag at the horse's head, saying hoarsely: "You're a good'un, Wawaga! I'll do as much fer you if ever I git ther chance."

"Ugh!" grunted the old woman. "Squaw no good; heap good white man, no let ol' Injun die! All even now. Here—ol' squaw take um—no good, b'long white man." She thrust a black something into his hand, and, turning stolidly ound, re-entered the desolate cabin.

Peter Oberlin buried his spurs in his animal's flank, and the beast sprang forward, past the heaps of smouldering cinders and the rows of gum-trees, and headed straight for the mountains. In his unwounded hand, with the bridle, Pete held his long-lost briar-wood pipe.

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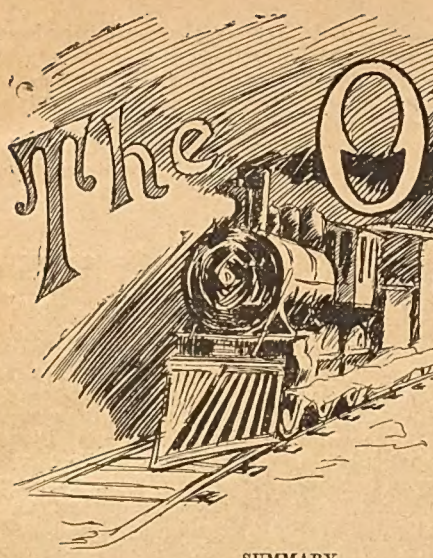


The Outlaws' Treasure.

Illustrated by MR. A. KEMP TEBBY.

—o—

SUMMARY.

The mail train has been robbed between Cornwall and La Grange stations, and £20,000 worth of gold stolen by a gang of desperadoes, headed by two brothers named Mulligan Two passengers on the train—Adolph Squirrek, *alias* Smith, a detective tracking the Mulligans, and Fred Welden, a young lawyer—who have struck up an acquaintance on the way, alight at Somerville, where the former stopped at the "Drover," and the latter at his mother's house. During the night a message comes to say that Judge Woodland's horse has come back alone, and Weldon, together with Squirrek and two other men set out to find him, and discover one of Mulligan's confederates lying senseless on the road. The man, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the judge, is sentenced to forty years imprisonment. At Judge Woodland's Weldon meets a Spaniard named Alvarido Almanaz, and the two men become rivals for the love of Florence, the judge's daughter. Weldon is inveigled to a lonely bridge near Cornwall, and disappears. Squirrek pays a fruitless visit to the spot. Squirrek arouses the citizens of Cornwall, who make their way to the outlaws' hiding-place.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. SMITH FINDS A MYSTERIOUS SLIP OF PAPER.

As stealthily as shadows we advanced, and in a few seconds more were in front of the outlaws' cabin. I was a few feet in advance and observed that the door was a few inches ajar, which led me to believe that there was no one within, or that they were all asleep.

This supposition, however, was quickly renounced at the very moment of reaching my hand forward to push open the door, for I heard distinctly the sound of a footstep, as if someone were walking hastily over the floor in slippers. The door was slammed violently to, and we could hear the fastenings rapidly put in place.

This fired up my men, and with a shout they threw themselves against the door. But it was built with a view of just such emergencies as these, and it did not yield in the least.

At this juncture, my lieutenant, young Belknap, performed a deed which was certainly very daring and startling in its character. While the others were bumping and hammering away at the door, I suddenly saw him going over the roof of the cabin like a monkey; and before anyone suspected his intentions, he threw one foot over the wall of the heavy stone chimney, and the next instant dropped out of sight.

We all held our breath and listened. There was profound silence for a moment, and then a sound of scuffling was heard, and again silence, and then someone working at the door.

When it was opened, Belknap stood before us, exhausted, and behind him lay the fifth of the Mulligan gang, placed *hors de combat.*

"Were there no more?" I inquired.

"Not that I saw."

"You were brave, but it was too rash."

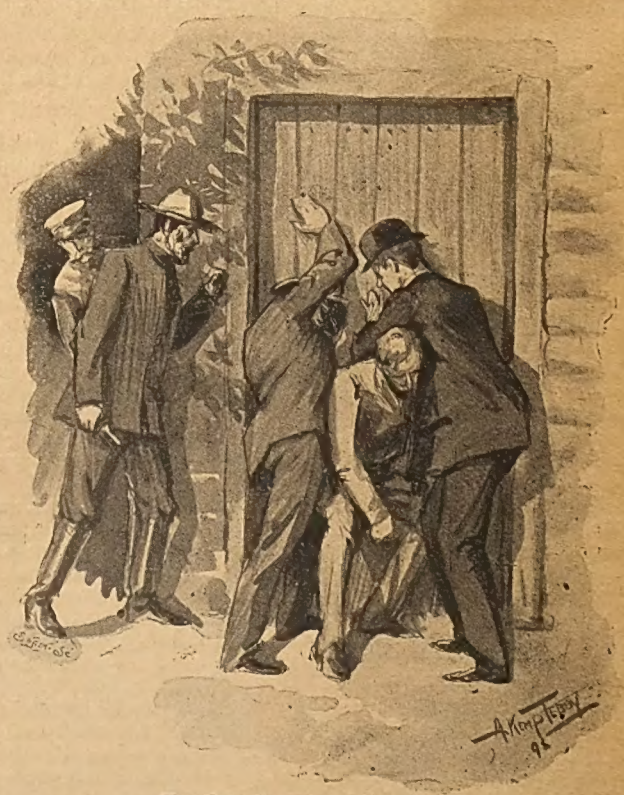
Up to this time I had a lingering hope that Fred Weldon would be found a prisoner in the building, and I still looked about me with a trembling, eager glance; but one glimpse of the room was sufficient to dissipate all such hope.

There was but a single apartment in the entire building, and it was without garret or cellar. A slight examination proved further that there was no "hidden chamber" or retreat provided for the vast amount of wealth that must certainly be in the possession of this gang.

I knew that there was a general expectation of finding a sort of Captain Kidd's treasure here, and the men began ransacking the cabin all through, and searching outside. There was no flooring at all, and the earth was packed almost as hard as a rock, yet they managed to harrow up every square foot—treating the dead body as a useless log—but their search was without any tangible result.

I was glad that nothing was found; not on my account, but for the sake of the men, who would have been demoralised by the sight of gold, and probably would have fallen to wrangling and fighting over it, and unquestionably serious results would have followed.

"They are too cunning to hide their treasure here," I remarked, with a smile, when I saw they were about to despair. "They have taken good care to put it where there is no danger of any of *us* finding it."



They threw themselves a'nst the door.

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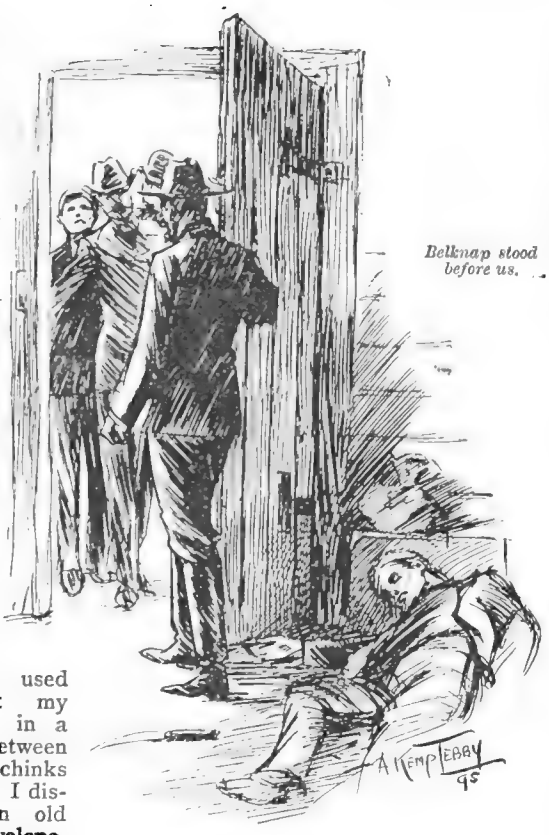


Belknap stood before us.

They were very reluctant to give up the search, but, by this time, they began to feel a sort of shame at their diversion from their first object in coming thither, and they announced themselves ready to leave the island.

While they were thus occupied I was not idle myself, although I used little but my eyes; but in a crevice between the rough chinks of the logs I discovered an old yellow envelope, without superscription of any kind, but within, written in a fine hand, upon a carefully-folded piece of notepaper, was the following:—

"1——0——1

"Cfujk't Bsdfj 5ozct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg."

I saw at once that there was something here, but it was in the form of a riddle, which I had no time to study out that time. So I placed it carefully away in my pocket-book, to be examined at my leisure.

As nothing more remained to be accomplished, we set fire to the cabin and pulled off from the island. As the poor wretch of an outlaw was dead beyond all surgical skill, it was no cruelty to him that he was burned according to the Hindoo fashion.

We found our friends impatiently awaiting us on shore, where they were anxious to be led against the remnant of the outlaws. As these numbered only three, and they were not known to be anywhere in the vicinity, we started on our way back to Brampton.

As no clue had yet been obtained to the whereabouts of young Weldon, quite a number were anxious to make a search for him—a proceeding in which I gladly assisted. We ranged up and down Devil's Creek, examining the limpid stream with a minuteness that revealed every frog which had not yet retired to his winter quarters.

I was pleased and not disappointed at their failure to discover anything at all that could throw light upon the disappearance of Weldon; for I had a theory of my own which held out strong hope of unearthing my friend, and had they come upon his inanimate body, of course my whole theory would have exploded.

It was growing dusk when we swarmed up the railway line and signalled the westward bound train, which set us down in the station at Brampton about half an hour later.

Here we learnt that the rising against the Mulligan brothers was not confined to Cornwall alone. Hundreds were scouring the country for a radius of fifty miles round.

A few minutes after our arrival, a telegram was received announcing that Jake Johnson, another of the outlaws, had been caught in a barn a few miles from Somerville, whither he had been chased by a party of men, half of whom were on horseback. Refusing to surrender, the barn had been fired and he burned within it, but not until he had killed two of his pursuers and desperately wounded three others.

This left, as was generally believed, only the two leaders, Dick and Jim, at large, and no one seemed to have any inkling of their whereabouts. They had probably been warned, and were securely concealed somewhere by their friends, and doubtless would soon effect their escape out of a neighbourhood which had suddenly become too hot to hold them.

The excitement in Cornwall subsided as rapidly as it arose. There was a vast deal of conversation regarding the proceedings of the day, but as no one had any additional information to communicate, they soon tired of this, and the usual quiet reigned over the town.

I found myself quite a lion, however, and saw that the only way I could escape being bored to death, was either to leave the place or to don a disguise which could not be penetrated.

In the quiet of the evening, and when alone in my room, I took out my bit of writing, and for two hours intently studied it, seeking some clue to its meaning; but not the slightest success rewarded my perseverance. To me it was as dumb as the Sphinx.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Relates what Happened on the Platform.

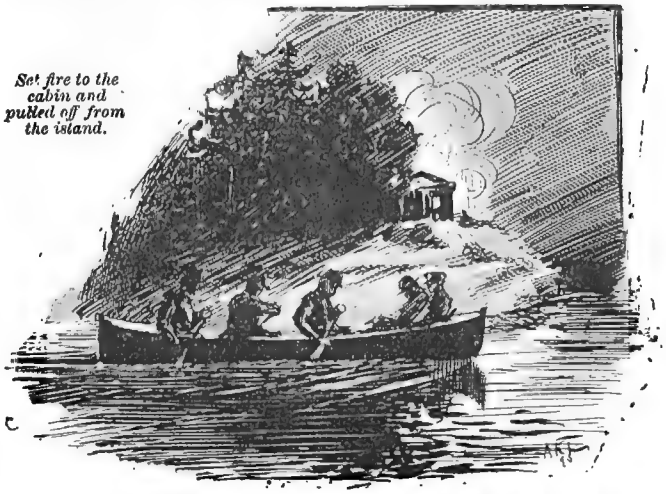
Thursday, November ——.—This morning, on my way to the station to take the train to Somerville, I dropped in at the post-office, and received the following note, postmarked Chicago, and addressed to Richard X. Smith, the name I recorded on the hotel register yesterday:

"Sir,—Frederick Weldon, about whose disappearance you are so greatly concerned, is in Chicago, and was seen there to-day, and addressed by me. He says he has reasons for keeping his presence here unknown to his friends at home for some time to come. I tell you this that you may rest easy.—George Jacquet."

No doubt the individual writing the above note thought he did a very clever thing when he sent it to me, but as it happens to be in the same hand that wrote the warnings to the jury when "poor Tom Borie" was on trial, and that penned the letter that drew Weldon to the bridge over the Devil's Creek, it certainly did not deceive me for an instant.

It proved one thing only to my mind. The search for Weldon had become so close and vigorous that certain parties were becoming uneasy, and the letter was a ruse intended to throw us off the scent.

There was no little comfort afforded me in the reception of this letter, for it pointed more strongly than ever to my young friend still walking the earth, and it gave me a capital opportunity of effectually blinding those who were evidently watching my movements.


Set fire to the cabin and pulled off from the island.

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When I was about to procure my ticket for Somerville, I went back to the hotel, under the plea that I had forgotten something, and remained in my room for over an hour. Then I told the landlord that I was going towards Chicago, to be gone probably some time. And so I went.

At the station I purchased a ticket for Chicago, and sped on towards that wonderful city, with no intention of going to it for some time to come. I carefully scanned the faces of all the passengers in my car, but I am convinced that there was no one following me, and that I was free from all observation, except that of a general character.

After changing cars several times, and crossing the line into Illinois, I left the train at a small village, which boasted the euphonious name of Cabbagetown. At a little miserable tavern I managed to secure a room, where, during the evening, I made my metamorphosis.

In the morning I appeared in a bushy red wig, with my complexion dyed an olive colour, and in the habiliments of a Western drover, my trousers being tucked in at the top of my boots, while I had a swaggering air which was as good as the genuine. This is simply my disguise in which to get back to Somerville without being recognised. After I reach that place I can make any change necessary, but I think it will throw *them* or *him* off the track, or, as Weldon terms it, in his journal, *the shadow*.

The landlord stared at me like one thunderstruck when I made my appearance, but I explained it by saying that I had called to see my friend Jones, who would shortly be down.

This satisfied him, although what he thought when Jones proved *non est* is more than I can imagine. Perhaps he imagined that he had been annihilated by me, or spirited away in some mysterious manner.

It was raining when I reached the station in Cabbagetown, and the train was two hours behind time, so I had a dreary spell of it in the rickety station until I could start to Somerville again.

At first I sat down by the fireplace and endeavoured to study out the curious piece of writing, that had been discovered in the outlaws' cabin, but as I never was expert at doing such things, I had not the incentive which a slight prospect of success gives anyone.

We detectives may boast of our success in "working up" cases, yet those who are in the profession know how much depends upon chance or accident. A clue thus obtained often leads to success; but when a man has his wits alone to use, without any extraneous help in the way of accidental

The landlord stared at me like one thunderstruck.

I could hear the murmur of their voices.

discovery, he is baffled and completely defeated more frequently than is generally supposed.

In this little country village of Cabbagetown I never dreamt for a moment that anything would be seen or heard having the slightest bearing upon the disappearance of Frederick Weldon; and yet, while waiting for the train, I made a discovery which gave me more light than anything I had as yet learned.

I was walking moodily along the dark station, smoking my cigar, while a drizzling rain was falling upon me, when I suddenly became aware that there were two other men also on the platform, engaged in doing the same. They, however, kept beyond the feeble light thrown out by the lamp of the stationmaster, and I could just make out their forms as they slowly walked back and forth.

I could hear the murmur of their voices, and it was evident that they were conversing very earnestly about something. At the distance where I stood it was impossible to detect a word, so I began manœuvring to get a nearer position without attracting notice, not with the expectation of learning anything important, but from a habit I have got into of endeavouring to pick up every scrap of information possible, without regard to the time and occasion.

Back and forth I walked, puffing at my cigar, and gradually extending my walk until I managed to encounter the strangers and to get a glimpse of their faces. They ceased talking when I came within earshot, but the momentary glance I obtained disclosed the fact that both of the individuals, although strangers to me, were in disguise.

Whether a detective becomes long-eared in time may well be questioned, but he certainly grows sharp-eared, and by-and-bye I caught a word.

"It's rather risky," said one.

"I don't see as it is. No one will know us."

"But they've woke up in that neighbourhood, and be apt to nab the first feller they catched near the bridge."

"Then *he'll* be snapped up, if there was danger, but he's very sharp, and I'm afeard he'll be a little too sharp for us."

Here we receded from each other, and it was several minutes before I caught their utterances again. As yet I had no suspicion that their words concerned me at all, but I was startled by what I heard next.

"If we can get there before him he may go to the dogs, and we'll give this neighbourhood a wide berth after this."

"Better wait until the excitement dies out," said the more cautious stranger.

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"And lose it all," growled the other.

"How do you know that he can find it?"

"Hasn't he got the paper?"

"Of course he has, but he hasn't got the brains to make it out."

"Can't be sure of that; he'll play sharp on us if he gets a chance, and I 'spect he's larned how to read it."

"Then make him try to coax me to show him?"

"All a blind——."

Again the drizzling rain intervened, and shut out the words. The men glanced at me several times, but they were earnest and did not speak in as low tones as they imagined. Anxious as I was to hear the rest of their words, I was compelled, for appearance sake, to saunter away until I was beyond earshot.

Then I lit another cigar and stood at the other end of the station, as if I was listening the coming of the train, which I sincerely hoped would be delayed a half hour longer at the least.

"If you are determined to risk it, you can do so."

"You will go with me?"

"Of course."

"They thinned us out pretty well; they haven't left us Jubal, even, the harmless darkie."

"We're even there, for we've used up more of them. I only wish we had that young dog off our hands."

"He soon will be; he's the game of the Duke."

"Delays are dangerous——"

The faint whistle of the far off train was heard and the men ceased talking.

"Have you your ticket?" suddenly asked one.

"No; let's get them."

I was within when they came in the station and saw them buy two tickets to the Junction, the point where we changed carriages to go to Somerville. As cautiously as I could I stole a glance at their faces, and fixed them in my mind.

They looked at me more than once, but I assumed my most innocent and oblivious expression, and neither had the remotest thought that that simple-looking drover had any suspicion of them.

Far up the road the starlight glimmer of the approaching engine was seen, and through the drizzling shower the shrill shriek of the whistle reached us as the train began to slacken speed.

My acquaintances buttoned their overcoats to their chins, and walked out upon the platform, I, as a matter of course, following close behind them.

They stood in silence a few moments, and then one of them muttered an imprecation against the weather as a blast of wind swept the driving rain into his face.

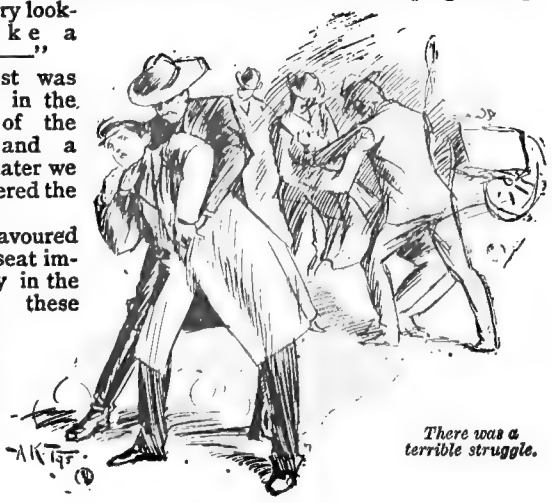
"There's one man I'd like to get even with," said the other.

"The feller that started this hunt?"

"Yes; that infernal detective that's been tramping through the country looking like a minister——"

The rest was drowned in the shrieks of the whistle, and a moment later we three entered the carriage.

I endeavoured to get a seat immediately in the rear of these gentry, but was disappointed, as the place was occupied.



There was a terrible struggle.

At the Junction I was no more fortunate, although I kept in the same carriage, and went with them to Somerville, where they went their road, and I mine.

But I was well convinced by this time that I had made the acquaintance of no less personages than the two veritable Mulligan brothers, who, by some powerful attraction, were drawn towards the very central point of danger to themselves.

But they were in my power, the man who of all others was the least disposed to show them a particle of mercy.

I was able to hear every word they uttered.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTURE OF THE BROTHERS.

I SAID the Mulligan brothers went their way, and I mine, which was simply because our paths were the same. They preceded me to the Drover's Hotel, which we reached just as night was closing in (for a great many miles intervened between Somerville and Cabbagetown). As I suspected, they were going to lodge in the same house with me. I kept out of sight until they had eaten their supper, and gone to their rooms.

Then I passed into the bar-room, and saw the signature of Richard Phillips and James Wilson, and the room they had taken; after which I went out and made my way to the mayor's office.

After a few preliminaries I finally put the question:

"Any prospect of capturing the Mulligan brothers?"

"Not much; they have been in too many hard scrapes to be caught in this one. And then, they have had time to get out of the neighbourhood."

"Is there any reward out for their apprehension?"

"The man who can enable us to put our hands upon these two brothers will make £2,000."

"Well, sir, if you will give me sufficient force I will capture both of those men, and produce them at this office within an hour!"

The old fellow rose from his seat and stared at me in amazement for a few seconds.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Never more so in my life."

"You shall have your men, then. How many do you want?"

"Four or five."

He summoned the six police officers which constituted the whole force of Somerville. One of these acted as marshal, and we started towards the Drover's Hotel.

On the very eve of success, we came within a hair's breadth of failing. The Mulligan brothers had left the hotel at the time we reached it, and we learnt that they had gone to a livery stable, doubtless intending to make their contemplated visit to the "Bridge" during the night.

Fearful of their escaping us altogether, we broke into a run for the stables, and reached them just as the two men were entering a light cart to drive away.

There was a terrible struggle before they were captured, and once or twice I thought that these two desperate men would overcome more than three times their number who were struggling with them. Pistol shots were freely fired, and when a crowd began collecting, I believe the desperadoes only surrendered through fear of falling into their hands.

They were hurried off to gaol, and on the way thither, the ominous cry of "Lynch them! Lynch them!" was heard, but the officers made all haste through the street with them, and had them hustled and locked into the gaol before the mob had time to organise for a rescue.

During the combat with the police officers, the wigs and disguises had been stripped from the outlaws, so that they were readily recognised by the crowd.

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The mayor had strong fears of the gaol being attacked, and he placed as large a force as he could organise on guard round it during the night. There were mutterings of a storm, which grew more portentous as the night advanced until I finally made my way towards the official's office to advise him to make a speech to the crowd, or to do something to conciliate them.

As I went in, I encountered a tall man coming out. We met in the dark, so that I could not see his face, although I suspected his identity.

"Who was he?" I inquired as soon as I was sure he was beyond hearing.

"A Spaniard, I presume, from the name he gave—Almanaz."

"You will excuse me," I said; "but it will help the cause of justice if you will tell me what errand he had with you."

"He asked me for a note that would admit him into the gaol to see the Mulligans."

"Did you comply with his request?"

"I did, after considerable importunity on his part. He said they had stolen and concealed a vast amount of plate and jewellery belonging to a friend of his, and he thought he could frighten the secret out of them now that they were in durance."

"Now, give me a note to the gaoler in the form of a peremptory order, whether you are legally empowered to do so or not, that he admits me to the cell adjoining that where these two men are confined."

The mayor looked rather doubtfully at me.

"I must hear what passes between these parties. It is all-important—and excuse me if I remind you that there is little time for delay."

Without a word he took up his pen and wrote a few lines, and then handed them to me. "Will that do?"

"The thing exactly; thank you, sir. Now put on your hat and come to the gaol with me. There are signs about that building that look bad, and that must receive attention."

"I understand you, sir," he replied, as he put on his hat; "whether a speech from me will produce any good effect or not remains to be seen."

In a few minutes he withdrew.

"Let us make haste," said I, beginning to feel a little nervous.

We walked rapidly, and ten minutes later were pushing our way through the surging crowd round the gaol.

We found the gaoler excited, frightened, and angry. Although the mayor was with me, yet he refused to admit me.

"Wait until to-morrow, or till this crowd disperses."

"But you have just allowed a visitor to go in."

"Yes."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I was so frightened I didn't know what I was doing."

"It was not that *alone*," remarked the mayor with a significant smile. "Mr. Jenkins here *must* go in; his request *must* be complied with. Do you act as his conductor, therefore, while I go out and do my best towards dispersing this crowd, which seems to be getting clamorous."

The gaoler sullenly complied, and as I passed in, I heard the mayor's voice rising above the din of the multitude. "Fellow citizens——," and then the hasty closing of the door shut out the rest of his speech.

My cicerone walked rapidly to a certain cell, hastily unlocked it, and then slammed it to behind me with such violence that, for a moment, I was sure he had fastened me in. In fact he was so sullen and out of humour that I did not exchange a word with him.

Despite the clamour and racket on the outside, a tomb-like silence prevailed within. The cells were separated by thick walls, which made it impossible for me to catch what was said distinctly; but by shoving my door partly open, I was enabled to hear every word uttered.

The preliminaries had evidently been concluded, and the three men were talking "business."

"Who got us in this scrape?" demanded one of the Mulligans in a sullen, gruff voice, which seemed to insinuate an accusation against the Spaniard himself.

"It was the work of that vile detective," replied the Cuban.

"How did he know us?"

"He followed you to Cabbagetown, heard you talking together, and rode all the way back to Somerville with you in the train, as far as I can make out."

The language which followed this piece of information cannot be imagined nor described; and it was fearful to hear the imprecations which they called down upon the head of the innocent-looking drover, that they had scarcely deemed worth a moment's notice.

At the same time it was a source of wonder to me how the señor had become acquainted with this little exploit of mine, which I imagined to be a secret from every one. It was probably a sharp conjecture of his, from seeing me go into the mayor's office, and observing the part I took in the arrest.

"Is there any likelihood of their getting in?" was the next question, which, doubtless, referred to the mob outside.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," replied Almanaz. "I tell you it looks pretty dark. Now, Jim, you promised me long ago to tell me the meaning of this writing; and what is the sense of waiting any longer?"

"I'll see you hanged first," was the moody reply.

"That would be a smart trick," added the other, "to let you walk out there, get it all, walk away with it, and then leave us without a cent."

"But what chance have you of getting out, any way?"

"We'll soon show them."

"But I'll swear that I won't take more than my third. You know I am entitled to that much."

"And you'll get it, too, when we get out of this fix, and not before."

Still the Cuban refused to be denied. He certainly had a great prize at stake, or he would not have held on in this manner.

"Car-a-ah!" he exclaimed with that low, rattling guttural so expressive of intense anger. "You're fast, you're gagged, and what good will it do you to carry the secret to the grave with you?"

"We haven't got to the grave yet," was the boastful retort of one of the Mulligans. "We're some way off yet."

"You may be nearer than you think."

"So may you; but why do you come to us? You've got it there on paper—why don't you read it yourself?"

"I can't make it out."

The outlaws laughed, and the señor renewed his entreaties, but they were in vain, and in a few minutes he withdrew, with muttered threats of being revenged upon them.

I waited until I was certain he was beyond sight, and then I followed. Outside I was surprised and pleased to find that not a soul was visible. The crowd were all gone, doubtless dispersed by the eloquence of the mayor. The hour was late, and I went straight to the hotel and retired.

(*To be continued.*)

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THE BURGLAR'S PETTICOATS

—o—

My friend, the burglar, when I asked him to drink, called the buxom young lady behind the bar Flossie, dorling, and asked her to give him some gin hot—unsweetened.

"Don't drown it," he said, when she was putting the water in—"don't drown it. Give it a chawnce. It cawn't swim, you know." He leant across the counter and spoke more lovingly to the magnificent young person. "I sy; I sy, where're you a-going to next Sunday, Ader? Eh? Give us one of them violets you've got."

The magnificent lady frowned at him with such loftiness that I expected him to die on the spot. But he didn't. He only hummed a tune intended, I think, to have a topical reference.

The lady at the bar panted and said breathlessly (and with no stops) "What next," she wondered, "horrid fellow, little less noise, if *you* please, you're not in a low music hall now." He responded to this with some feeling that he wished he was.

He drank to a toast of ten thousand a year for all of us, and sat down near me. Then he took off his soft cap, and silently dusted a few crumbs off the marble table, and put it on again.

"The best-looking business *I* was ever mixed up in," he said slowly, "was down at Heron Court, near Guildford. I may be a bit old-fashioned in my tastes, but I've always been rather partial to duchesses." (He said this with a relish, as though they were something sold in tins.) "And when I saw in *Lloyd's* that the young duke had gone and married Miss Deborah Clancy, daughter of the well-known rubber merchant, of New Haven, Connecticut; and when I saw that the wedding presents was both numerous and costly, and the happy pair had left town for the duke's house near Guildford, amid a shower of rice and old slippers, then I said to myself, I said, 'Go in and win, my boy, and play the game off of your own bat. Don't have no partners,' I says to myself. 'Don't have no confederates, but just go in and have a good old try.' So I dressed myself up very tastefully, and I went down to Milford Station.

"I had a Gladstone bag with me, and in that bag I had a few necessary articles that no one can do without.

"I was walking out one afternoon, and I was going down a lane pretty close to the grounds of the mansion. In front of me was a neat girl in blue serge, with a bonnet-box in her hand. She was one of the slim-waisted sort, and she carried herself very upright. As I passed her I caught sight of the address. It was for the Duchess. I lifts my hat like this—look!

"'Pardon me, miss,' says I, 'but might you be one of the maids at Heron Court?'

"'Well,' she says, 'I might.'

"'Oh!' I says. 'Pleasant weather we're having, aren't we!'

"She said yes it was very pleasant weather indeed. She said (this she said in a particularly affable way) she was afraid we should have wet before night.

"'Been here long?' I inquires.

"No, she hadn't been there long, she said. Only three weeks.

"'Come down with the duke's party, I suppose?'

"Yes, she said, she came down with the duke's party.

"'Like the place?'

"She said she didn't mind it. I asked her a few questions about the people. She said she could get on all right with the duke, and she was on awful good terms with the duchess; but she wouldn't give a shilling a gross for the servants. For one thing, she didn't believe they kept a proper look-out at the place. Whilst they were wasting their time in smoking and drinking and flirting, a burglar could get in at almost any moment.

"'Oh, well, miss, after all,' I says, 'we're none of us perfect, you know. We all have our little 'obbies.'

"I put on my best smile and made up my mind to have a dash for it. I asked her whether there was any chance of having a look in and a bit of supper in the evening. She looked at me very straight. Then she said a thing that knocked me silly.

"'I say, mister,' she says, 'where do I come in? How much am I going to make out of this little game?'

"I was so astonished that I quite blushed. I did, really.

"'Well,' I says, 'if you are going to put it that way, I suppose I'd better speak out straight. I'll give you twenty quid now, and I'll give you another twenty after it's over.'

"'Make it thirty sovereigns now and thirty after,' she said, 'and I'm your woman.'

"I started to argue a bit, and she turned on her heel.

"'Here stiddy on, my dear,' I says. 'Don't lose your temper. You've got a good-hearted face. You're not going to be hard on a poor chap, are you now? Give me a kiss and I'll give you twenty-five.'

"She fired up.

"'You don't have no kiss, mister,' she says, 'and if you want me to help you, you must hand over the coin. You kent do better, anyway.'

"I tell you she fairly knocked me over. I assure you, to look at her, you'd think she was as quiet a girl as ever wore shoes. She kept her eyes—bright, black eyes she had—fixed on my face, and seemed almost to enjoy the corner she'd got me in.

"I turned the matter quickly over in my mind. After all, I knew I needn't trouble about the second payment. I should be clear away before she had a chance to see whether I put it there or not.

"'All right, miss,' I says, 'don't 'aggle; and don't bite a feller's 'ead half 'orf. Here's the thirty pound. What time shall I come up?'

"She told me that at half-past eight the duke would be having dinner, and that she would leave the window of the duchess' dressing-room open. I might find a ladder in such a place, and, when I got in, I should find the jewels in such a place, and some loose notes and gold in such a place, and I was to leave my thirty pound for her on a ledge in the chimney. And if any of the other servants caught me, why, so much the worse for me, and if they did not, so much the worse for them. She shook hands pleasantly and went off towards the Court.

"I felt inclined to shake hands with myself, too. I knew that there was a good twenty thousand pounds' worth of stuff if I could only get a quiet quarter of an hour there.

"You may believe me when I say I was there that evening to the minute. Just as I neared the mansion I had a nasty feeling that the maid might have given me away. You can never be sure of women. But when I saw the window of the duchess' dressing-room open, and found the ladder and everything ready, I knew it was all right.

"'She's a girl after my own heart,' I said to myself when I got into the room. 'And I'll be after her's when it's all over.'

"It's risky work, you know. No matter how easy things are, you always have a queer sort of nervousness unless you're drunk, and then, of course, you're liable to make mistakes.

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None of the servants was about; they might have been dead for all the trouble they gave me.

"I don't think I ever had quite such an easy job in all my life. 'This,' I said to myself—'This is better than your hard work any day. Honesty may be the best policy, but what do you make out of it? Eh? Do you make hauls of sackfuls of jewellery and money by honesty? Do you make enough in ten minutes to keep you for years, and drunk every night of your life, by honesty? No,' I said to myself (I had got the sack nearly full), 'if you want to get on in life, if you really want to have a nice little income and a life of happiness, have a turn at——'"

There was a swish of skirts near the bed. I turned my lantern on the place, my heart in my mouth, my revolver in my hand. I can tell you I was pleased to see that it was only my girl. I dropped my Colt back into my pocket. She was smartly dressed, and looked quite the lady.

"'Got everything, mister?' she inquired. 'Got everything?'

"'Well, not abslootly everything,' I whispered; 'but as much as I can carry. I'm just off.'

"'Have you put my thirty sovereigns in the chimney?' she asked. She had a head for business, that girl.

"'Reckon I'll take them now,' she said, calmly holding out her hand. 'I guessed you'd go and forget.'

"I counted out the money and handed it over, and shouldered my bag.

"'Good-bye, miss,' I whispers. 'See each other again soon, I hope.'

"'Awful good of you to say that,' she said. 'Feel as though I kent let you go now.' Her hand went to the side of the wall. 'We're getting on so sociable, and pleasant, and friendly like.'

"I can't tell you how it made me feel when I heard her talk like that. I would have proposed to that girl on the spot if I hadn't been so busy. Only there's a time and a place for everything, I always say, and just then wasn't the time to go canoodling about with girls.

"I went to her to give her a kiss and a good-bye. She gave a little scream.

"'Stop!' she cried. 'Stop, mister, or you're a dead man!'

"She levelled a shining little pocket pistol at my head, the other hand still pressing against the wall. There was a sound of hurried footsteps on the landing; the door opened, and a muscular young fellow in evening dress rushed in. He was followed by several servants.

"'My dearest Deborah,' he cried. Then he sprang upon me and nearly choked me.

"'Here, let go!' I screamed. 'Where's the duchess? Where's the duchess? Lemme go, can't ye. I want to tell her something. I want to tell her all about that beauty of a lady's-maid there. She's got my sixty pounds.'

"'And she jest about means to keep it,' she answered, laughing. 'It'll make a good start for my village blanket club.' She turned to the duke. 'Now, you see, Tunbridge, how Heron Court is protected.'

"'My dearest,' said the duke, 'you're quite right. You shall make your own arrangements now.'

"She spoke to one of the footmen.

"'Give him a good sousing, Barker, with the garden hose, and let him slide.'

"'Certainly, your grace. Now then, me man, this way.'

"And they took me, and, as I'm a living sinner, they ducked me. Had a narsty cold in me 'ead, I did, for years awter."

To prevent unnecessary labour, and consequent disappointment, to any readers of this paper, who in the past have forwarded original stories for insertion, we would take this opportunity of saying that our arrangements for the provision of matter for "Short Stories" are complete for some time to come.

A New Pair of Eyes

"Oh, how perfectly delicious that is!" said Mrs. Conrad, enthusiastically. She had been seated very quietly holding a patch of brown and gold on the lap of her crêpe skirt, thrown there from the stained glass window with the angel and the lute on it. Miss Day's finger-tips had given a last feathery touch to the shortest of the harp strings, and George released the soft pedal which had been like a hand upon the mouth to a searching chord of the organ.

She had run in to pay an afternoon call, and Louie and George had played for her. Such a mocking widow in the declining stage of her crêpe! But she would not bate one thread of conventional gloom as tribute to poor Conrad until the last second of the full term of mourning was over, and that would not be until next month.

"Louie, can't you make us a cup of tea?" said George to his sister. "Be as long about it as you can," he whispered to her. "Two lumps of sugar for us both. Mrs. Conrad needs to be built up after this spasm of music."

As she whisked out George crossed the room. Mrs. Conrad had been on the most intimate terms with the Days for years. She was not much older than Louie. She was not even disturbed when George took her hand in his and said:

"Sadie, your time of mourning is nearly over, isn't it?"

"You mean, I suppose, my time of wearing black," she returned. "I shall drop it next month. And, George, I am almost sorry to moult my raven's plumage. It is awfully becoming."

"Anything is awfully becoming to you," he replied. "But, Sadie, I must be a little abrupt, because, although I told Louie to be as long as she could, one can't take very long to brew a cup of tea. I might as well say it without any fuss. I love you. I want to marry you."

"Why, George, you surprise me!" and she looked at him in a puzzled way. "Of course you love me. So do I love you, just as much as I do Louie. But, George, what an idea! I had never thought of marrying you."

"Well, if you love me, will you please think of it a moment, and then say, 'Why, yes, certainly?' I am easily satisfied."

He was so full of fun that he could not quite divest himself of a comical air, even now, when he was thoroughly in earnest.

"But, George, I don't love you in that way at all," expostulated the widow.

"Well, Sadie, it has been growing on me. It is a pity we are such good friends. You might feel the situation more if we weren't. But, Sadie, try and realise—won't you, please?—that I want you to be my wife, and that I shall not be very happy if you won't. Can't you love me enough for that?"

"Why, I do love you, George, but this seems so strange! I can't say yes, dear. I don't feel it a bit. And yet I love—that is, I am fond of you. Don't ask me such a thing. I don't want our pleasant relations marred. George, I couldn't marry you," she continued hurriedly, "I don't want to marry any one. This is only an idea. It is like a bit of your drollery. I am going away so soon to have a good turn on the Continent, and be so independent. You don't mind, George, do you?"

"Oh, certainly not. Don't mention it," replied the young fellow, with sarcastic good nature. "It's so pleasant to have such a reputation for tomfoolery that when you implore a woman to marry you she says, 'There, you droll thing, don't be so ridiculously funny!' Only, Sadie, I wish you would do me the justice to feel that I am not altogether playful; I don't know how to make you feel it, but I love you dearly, and I want to marry you ever so much. You know whether you care enough for me to marry me, and you can answer me as

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seriously as if I were a skeleton and death's head. For I am in earnest, Sadie."

She felt he was, and that confused her the more. She did not want to hurt his feelings. But she had never thought of George Day as a possible husband.

"Dear George, I am sorry, but I can't marry you," she faltered. "Don't be distressed about it. I can't help it."

"Here is Louie," exclaimed Mrs. Conrad under her breath. "Does she know anything about this, George?"

He shook his head slowly.

His sister entered the room, a servant following with the tea things. She darted a quick glance at the pair.

Louie came over with a cup of tea after the servant had withdrawn. She stood before Mrs. Conrad holding it in her hand as she said with mocking solemnity, "Sadie, did you say 'yes'?"

"Of course I did," asserted Mrs. Conrad. "George asked if my mourning would be over next month, and it will. What else could I say? I have the smartest tailor-made travelling suit of a pale brown."

"But didn't George ask you to marry him?" persisted Louie, holding the cup away from Mrs. Conrad's outstretched hand.

"What has happened to you all? Give me my tea, Louie. Of course George hasn't asked me to marry him. At least not since we were children, twelve years ago. People who have known each other for fifteen years don't want to marry."

"Give her the tea, Louie," said George, drily. "Do not let personal feeling interfere with strict justice. If Mrs. Conrad prefers to have somebody else pay for her tea for life, that is no reason why you should trample on the sacred name of hospitality."

"Well, Sadie," Louie said spitefully, "there is your tea. I know something dreadful will befall you for refusing George. I don't see how a woman can be so blind."

"This little episode mustn't interfere with the life-long friendship that has existed between us," said George in a very good imitation of his usual manner. "I daresay it was very indelicate in me to make such a proposal. I am willing to offer Mrs. Conrad every reparation a lady can demand."

"There! Now you are talking like yourself," said Mrs. Conrad, with a gusty sigh of relief. "George was overcome by the music. Don't say anything about it, Louie. We are awfully good friends, and always shall be. Won't we, George?"

"Until death do us part," he said, and shook her hand warmly. In diplomatic language the episode was closed.

Mrs. Conrad looked very nice and handsome in her new gown when she bade them good-bye a week later. She betook herself to the Continent and travelled to her heart's content for six months. Then she began to feel homesick. She wanted the Days. She wanted George. It was surprising to her that she missed him so much. In her thoughts she was constantly thinking, "I wish George was here. Dear George!"

One day she suddenly turned back. She was tired of being alone and yearned for Newtown. She wrote to the Days from Lucerne that she was coming, and soon after started.

It was a brilliant, clear day in spring when she arrived in her native town. As soon as she had her belongings settled in her house, she called on the Days. The windows were open and she heard the organ. George was playing the Wedding March from Lohengrin.

Mrs. Conrad, her face wreathed in smiles, forbade the servant to announce her, and tiptoed softly into the drawing-room. George was sitting at the organ playing with his wonted enthusiasm. She approached on tiptoe and put her warm, soft hands over his eyes without saying a word.

"Sadie!" he exclaimed instantly, and wheeled about holding out his hands. She grasped them. The expression in his eyes startled her.

"Aren't you glad to see me, George?" she demanded gaily. "Why do you look so oddly?"

"Come over here and sit down," he answered cheerfully.

"Sadie," said the young man in his cheerful tones, turning his face towards her, but without fixing his eyes upon her, "I have lost my sight. We didn't say anything about it in our letters for fear it would make you distressed. I am very glad to have you back. Did you have a good time?"

"Oh, George!" she cried, whipping out her handkerchief, "you don't mean that you are hopelessly blind?"

"That is it, exactly." His cheery tones and perfect calmness only made the bitterness of it the more keen. "But don't be anxious about it, Sadie. I knew it was coming, and I memorised all the music Louie and I play together, and there isn't really very much difference."

"Oh, George! What an angel you are!"

"You mustn't mind it, Sadie. It can't be helped. Of course I am grateful for your sympathy, but you will make me feel miserable, if you trouble so about it."

"But it is so sudden, George," she sobbed. "And it is so dreadful to think that one can do nothing."

"Oh, but you can. You must come in and read for me sometimes. I shall use your services very liberally. Don't cry."

"George," she said softly, "do you remember what you said to me the last time I sat here with you?"

"Oh, yes," he replied firmly. "But I thought we decided then that I was an idiot to endanger the pleasant relations between us."

"But, George, you really felt what you said then, didn't you?"

"What does it matter, now, Sadie?" he replied, a touch of weariness in his voice. "I have thoroughly reformed," he added, with his old laughing touch.

"Then you have discovered that you didn't—you know. You don't care for me any more, George?"

"What lovely logic! I have only reformed my tongue, not my feelings," he returned.

"Then George," she said softly, "say it again."

She felt quite at liberty to blush furiously, for, poor fellow, he could not see her.

He gave a start. Then he said very quietly, "Sadie, I know how warm and sympathetic you are. The sudden sight of my condition makes you feel such pity that you are overcome. It is very good of you, but you mustn't yield to this feeling. I am quite resigned. More so than ever, now that you are back. But I am not going to take the advantage of your pity."

"George, I came back because I couldn't stay away any longer. And though, of course, I do feel, more than I can tell, your sad misfortune, yet it isn't pity only that I feel."

"But, Sadie, you can't love a poor blind wretch!"

There was more bitterness in his voice than he had yet shown.

"Try me and see," said Sadie.

When Louie entered the room a little later Mrs. Conrad blushed a rosy red—her head was upon George's shoulder.

"Louie," said George with a joyous ring in his voice, "I have found a new pair of eyes. Sadie and I are going to be married."

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

THE week after next SHORT STORIES will appear in a very much altered and improved form. The number of pages will be increased from 16 to 32, and it will, in fact, contain just twice as much reading matter as at present. We are making arrangements with some of the foremost writers of the day to contribute to SHORT STORIES, and I feel justified in saying that in its new form this paper will be the biggest and the best pennyworth of popular literature ever produced. Special attention is intended to be given to the Serial Story. On the conclusion of the one at present running we shall commence another which has been specially written for us, and which will exceed in interest anything hitherto published in SHORT STORIES. We shall have a good deal more to say on this subject next week.

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IN THE SECRET SERVICE.

THE bright, warm sunshine streamed along the white garden walk, glinted the precise rows of abalone shells, and furtively pushed its way through the low, open door into the cool, dark room, where he lay bandaged upon an easy chair. Reclining there luxuriously comfortable, his eyes dreamily wandered out and followed the massive adobe garden wall, with its old red tiles, until they met the California hills and the blue beyond showing through the arched, whalebone gate.

Suddenly the view was shut out; a dark-eyed girl stood in the doorway.

"*Buenos dias, señor*!" she cried blithely.

"*Buenos dias*, Doña Carlota?"

"That is very good, señor," laughed the girl. "Listen to the Spanish you hear and soon you will speak it, and be able to say something besides "good morning."

"But never enough to thank you for all you have done for me!"

"Ah! that is foolish to talk so"—with a pretty gesture of deprecation—"I did nothing. I found you lying in the cañon, and had you brought to our house. Who would not have done that?"

She took a stool close beside him, resting her chin in her hands, her big dark eyes fixed intently upon his face. He thought her the most ingenious as well as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Tell me more about yourself," she broke out, impulsively, as she placed a warm hand upon one of his. "When the fever was on you, I could not talk to you; but now you are almost well. Where did you come from, and what were you doing in the cañon? And you say your name is George Hilliard?"

"Did I tell you that?"

"*Si*; Don Jorge Hilliard."

"Carlota"—with some anxiety—"you must not repeat what I have told you. I cannot tell you now what brought me here."

And certainly he was delighted when he saw that his strange admonition brought no sign of doubt or suspicion into her face.

"It matters not, señor," she went on; "you are here now, and you will stay until you get well, and perhaps longer. My mother will not let you go."

"But, José?"

"José? Bah! Look! it is this way, señor. I have not many friends. The Americans, and the, what you call, Spanish do not mix together here. Spanish! Most of them are not Spanish, but Mexicans, South Americans, Portuguese, and Indians. The Machados are Castilians, señor, but I am an American. I was born here. I have been to the convent at Santa Barbara. That is why I speak such good English. I like Americans. Yes, my mother"—to a voice calling from another room—"I am coming," and she was gone.

Hilliard looked fondly after her as she left the room. Of course, he knew that she was in love with him—in love as only a Spanish woman can be. And he? Well, why not? Did he not owe his life to her? Was she not beautiful and good?

The days went by, and it was very pleasant for him. Never was convalescence more enjoyed. Carlota talked to him, and read to him, and tried to teach him Spanish.

Whether or not la Señora Madre approved of the violent flirtation going on under her roof and nose, was difficult to determine. She spoke "no Ingles," and her dark face was absolutely bereft of expression.

It was altogether different with José Sanchez. His intense hatred for the invalid and his fierce love for the girl were alike apparent. He galloped in from the ranche—which Carlota said was fifteen miles distant—almost daily, and spent hours in the room with the two, silently watching them, or else walked nervously about the garden smoking yellow paper cigarettes.

Carlota's artless and frank admission that José loved her, charmed the American; but he knew, nevertheless, that he had in him a rival not to be despised, and possibly to be feared. At the outset, he had made an effort to extend him more than the usual affability. He even presented him with an expensive cigarette-holder, which had been given him by an old sweetheart. But José, although he accepted the present, remained sullen, silent, and implacable.

It was not until the time came for Hilliard to make his departure that he asked Carlota to become his wife. Somehow a proposal of marriage had seemed to him an almost unnecessary proceeding, for he had made no effort to conceal his feelings, and Carlota, in her delightful simplicity, had given her heart to him without a struggle. The proposal, therefore, was not an ordeal.

But he had a mission to perform—one known only to himself. Promising Carlota to return in a few days, he took a train, ostensibly for San Francisco, and left it at the first station. Back he trudged until within a mile of the town, and then, leaving the road, he followed a trail into the mountains. It led him to the edge of a precipice, where great masses of earth and rocks, loosened by winter rains, had years before slid down as in an avalanche. Standing in the thick chaparral, it was easy for him now to see how he had walked over the brink. He leant over and looked down on the very spot where he had fallen.

Then he started on a cautious but seemingly erratic search for something in the mountain fastness. Backwards and forwards under the trees, down into gulches, beneath overhanging rocks, through narrow passes, and along steep trails, he went.

Late in the afternoon he found the object of his search. It was a cabin almost hidden by the branches of a fallen tree. From his pocket he took a revolver, examined it, and then moved stealthily towards the hut. It was deserted; he pushed back the door and entered. There was nothing unusual about the bare interior; a heap of charred embers on the hearth was the only sign that it had been occupied.

The embers interested him at once. On his knees he examined them carefully, sifted the ashes with his hands, and was rewarded by finding a broken die that had quite recently made counterfeit coins. With an exclamation of satisfaction, he took it to the light to inspect it more closely. Something on the floor at the threshold attracted his attention. He picked it up. It was an ornamental cigarette-holder—the one he had given José.

The following morning saw him back in the town, walking rapidly towards the house of the Machados. During the night, after long study, he had formulated a plan whereby Carlota and her mother would be spared the mortification consequent upon the publicity of the proposed arrest. José would be taken quietly away and no one would know of it.

He passed quickly through the gate, along the garden walk, and into the dwelling. Carlota's hat and gloves were on a table. A moment he stood there looking down upon them, and then the mother entered, expressionless as ever, and silently handed him a note. He opened it and read:

"*Señor Don Jorge Hilliard*:—I cannot marry you, because I have married Don José Sanchez. We sail from America to-day. Don José would have gone long ago, but he would not leave without me. I learnt your business after you were brought to our house, and thought it well to keep you there. I cannot tell you whither we sail. You are in the secret service. So am I. *Adios*.—CARLOTA."

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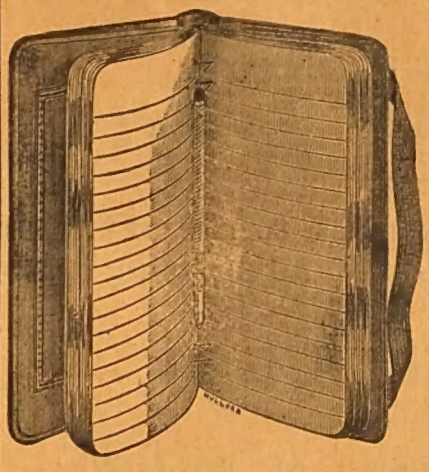

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